



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

TAJIKISTAN

SUCCESS STORY

Women Regain Rights To Land

Legal advocacy protects rights of vulnerable Tajik women



Photo: Eric Filipink

One of the members of Saodat farm proudly displays her Land Use Certificate, which was presented to her after more than two years of legal battles.

A legal aid center, created and supported by the USAID Land Reform and Market Development Project, helps a group of women regain their land rights and set an important example for the security of land tenure in Tajikistan.

One hundred women from the Saodat Farm in northern Tajikistan finally regained possession of 19 hectares of irrigated land that had been taken from them illegally.

In 2000, 100 hectares of non-irrigated land were distributed to a group of vulnerable women, mostly widows, and the Saodat Farm was created. Through donor assistance, irrigation was eventually installed on 19 hectares. The man who was hired to install the irrigation system, a well-connected member of the local community, subsequently took possession of the farm and used his influence and contacts to issue new documentation in his own name and to expel the women from the farm. The chairman of the former collective farm conspired with the man to effect this illegal land seizure. The women were threatened and even physically attacked to prevent them from trying to retake their land.

With support from USAID and several other donors, a local non-governmental organization dedicated to providing legal assistance to farmers agreed to represent the women and began court proceedings against both men. The process involved numerous court cases at both the regional and Supreme Court level that spanned almost three years. Although the courts consistently found in favor of the women, the decisions were never executed, the case bounced between various courts, and the women remained landless.

The dedicated lawyers working for the NGO and a USAID-supported Legal Aid Center followed the case throughout the entire process and insisted the courts execute their decisions. In February 2007, the women finally regained possession of their irrigated land and in August 2007, their official Land Use Certificates were issued.

This case set an important precedent in Tajikistan for the security of land tenure. Local press and mass media reported the story, leading to more interest from farmers in securing land rights. In the future, other USAID-supported Legal Aid Centers will use this example when advising farmers on their rights to land.